

Expectations

*A consumer's guide
to the expected behavior
of a health care provider*

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The consumer is the customer of health care services. As the consumer, you select or are assigned the professional to care for your health needs. You should expect to be treated well by your health care provider and feel confident in the care you receive.

As the consumer, it is your job to ask questions if you do not understand what is happening, or if you are afraid or unsure of the treatment you are receiving from your health care provider.

Who is a health care provider?

Any person who helps care for your health or helps you care for your family's health is a health care

provider. This includes doctors, nurses, dentists, social workers, nurse aides and other

persons who provide health-related services. Most health care providers are required to have permission from their respective state governments to practice. Often, health care providers are licensed by a state agency. This is the means by which the state authorizes (allows) the health care provider to care for you and can take action against the health care provider's license if he or she does not practice safely.

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National Council of State Boards of Nursing, Inc.

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What are professional boundaries?

Professional boundaries are the limits to how a health care provider acts with a patient. Think of the borders between states on the map. These lines do not actually exist on the highways and city blocks, but the borders serve to outline areas for a variety of activities (e.g., voting, schools, taxes).

Similarly, professional boundaries can be thought of as the lines that define the best

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area of behavior for health care providers when working with patients to meet their needs. The health care provider should conduct himself or

herself professionally as a doctor or nurse, not personally as a friend or family member. Boundaries help the health care provider determine how to act appropriately with the patient, deciding what is too much or too little contact. The health care provider aims for conduct that is “just right.”

What behavior should I expect from my health care provider?

Your health care provider should take care of your health needs and help you to do things for yourself as much as possible. Sometimes, health care requires patients to discuss personal topics, physical touching or treatments that may be painful. However, your health care provider should not take advantage of you or your situation and should stay out of your personal affairs, except as needed to protect you from harm. Your health care provider should always treat you with respect.

What behavior should I *not* expect from my health care provider?

Most health care providers provide caring and effective health care. But, the difference between a caring professional relationship and an over-involved relationship can be narrow. Sometimes health care providers can become too involved with patients — this is not good for the patient or the health care provider.

Your health care provider should not make you, the patient, feel uncomfortable with the relationship. For example, if your health care provider discusses personal problems or intimate feelings, keeps secrets with you or otherwise treats you differently than other patients,

these may be indicators of boundary problems. While this attention may make you feel good — as if you are a special patient — it may cause you to develop unrealistic expectations, which could prove harmful in the long run.

The most extreme example of a boundary violation is when a health care provider attempts to have sexual contact with a patient. While this kind of behavior does not happen often, it should *never* happen. Sexual contact between a health care provider and patient is never “all right.”

While sexual conduct between a health care provider and a patient rarely occurs, it should *never* happen. Sexual contact between the health care provider and patient is never “all right.”

What should I do if I am uncomfortable with my health care provider?

First of all, do not assume that your discomfort will simply go away by ignoring the situation. Instead, address your concerns by doing any of the following:

Talk to your family or friends about how you feel.

Speak to your health care provider.

Speak to your health care provider's supervisor.

Contact an ombudsman or patient representative.

Contact the licensing board or patient representative.

Remember, while professional misconduct does not happen often, it should *never* happen. If you believe you have been involved in a professional boundary or sexual misconduct situation with your health care provider, contact your health care provider's licensing board, the facility management, another professional, police, family or friends, but get help!

If you believe you have been involved in a professional boundary or sexual misconduct situation, seek help.

If I think my health care provider behaved inappropriately, to whom do I report the occurrence?

Licensing boards regulate health care providers. If you believe your health care provider violated a professional boundary or attempted to have sexual contact with you, contact the health care provider's respective licensing board.

As a handy reference tool, list the telephone numbers for licensing boards in your state below.

Board of Nursing:

Board of Medicine:

Board of Pharmacy:

Board of Dentistry:

Other Licensing Boards:
